

November 1991

Letters to the Editor

Katina Strauch
Against the Grain

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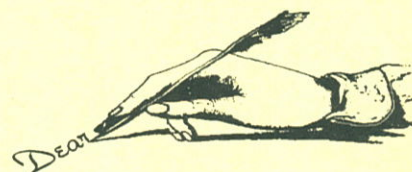
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Letters to the Editor



And I received this letter just as I was struggling with the November issue of *ATG*. Needless to say, it was welcome . . .

Dear Katina:

At the risk of "turning your head" I want to heap some more praise on your slender shoulders. *Against the Grain* is terrific — informative, amusing and genuinely productive in its linking of librarians, vendors and publishers. I also appreciate how much work goes into it, as I'm currently editing a less ambitious newsletter for the AAP Professional and Scholarly Publishing division as an adjunct to my marketing consulting.

Keep up the great work!

Sincerely,

Mark Sexton
President, Mark Sexton Associates
Pelham, New York

Dear Katina:

I think, by now, everyone appreciates the enormous effect on serial prices that was caused by devaluation of the U.S. \$ against the continental European currencies between 1984 and

1990(1). A recent article (2) which carefully analyses the methodology of cost-per-word studies in the field of optics, however, reveals some very disparate trends.

Forexample, between 1984 and 1988 the cost-per-word actually decreased for a number of society journals (*Appl. spectrosc.*, *J. ac. sci.*, *Appl. phys. lett.*, *J. Opt. Soc. B*, *Jpn. j. appl. phys.*, *IEEE j. quant. electron.*, *Electron. lett.*, *Opt. lett.*) as well as for one commercial journal (*J. mod. opt.* - Taylor & Francis).

While many other journals showed increases, most were well within the expected range of inflation, dollar devaluation, etc. There were three, however, which went so far beyond what seems reasonable that they require some explanation.

Spectrochimica acta B (Pergamon) increased from .0246 cents/word in 1984 to .0628 cents/word in 1988, an 155% increase; *Journal of optics* (Masson) increased from .0392 cents/word in 1984 to .0864 cents/word in 1988, an increase of 120%; and *Infrared physics* (Pergamon) increased from .0389 cents/word in 1984 to .0977 cents/word in 1988, an increase of 151%.

A question that comes to mind is "When is a given journal no longer

commercially viable?". Since the most egregious examples are published by Pergamon, it would be interesting to hear their explanation of what level the cents/word must rise before they would consider cessation of publication.

A second question is whether or not libraries should continue to blindly obligate themselves (by submitting renewal invoices before prices are known). Would it really be unreasonable to insist that prices be known before the renewal invoice is returned? This presumably would encourage some negotiation between publishers and librarians on journal pricing.

Sincerely,

Dana L. Roth
Head, Science & Engineering
Libraries,
Caltech, 1-32
Pasadena, California 91125

1. Roth, Dana L., "The serials crisis revisited", *Serials Librarian* 18(1-2): 123-9(1990).

2. Meyers, B. and Fleming, J.L., "Price analysis and the serials situation: Trying to solve an age-old problem", *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 17(2):86-92(1991). ☛

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for their generous contributions!
Thanks go as well to Ballen Booksellers for
mailing issues of
Against the Grain.